CHAPTER SIX

MAZHAB[1]

"Religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another" From a couplet by MAHOMED IQBAL

IN OUR TOWN in the north there has been a communal riot. At the street corners there are soldiers or policemen and a curfew order has been issued; no one may go out after 8 p.m. All the shops are boarded up and frightened Hindu *banias* cower behind the shutters, from time to time ringing up the police station for an army to guard them. The dark streets are strangely sinister; the normal friendly life has departed from them* On a seat sits a Muslim butcher with his knife glittering in what seems a horribly significant manner as he holds it on his lap like a mother holds a child. For seven long days the terror reigns. Food is short, because the shopkeepers will not open their shops. All business is stopped.

How did it all start? Nobody seems to know aright. Some hooligans attacked a Hindu wedding party just at the time of Muharram, when the Muslims organize processions in memory of the slain Hussain and weep and beat drums. Then this year Muharram almost coincided with Holi, the merry Hindu spring festival, and that always means trouble. At Holi everyone forgathers in the streets in an uproarious fashion, and it is the custom to sprinkle one another with various colours till the clothes are saturated; this amid much rough horse-play* Often Muslims participate in the fun, but feelings were strained. A cleanly dressed Muslim objects to the colour thrown on him, there is an altercation,

[1] *Mazhab* •• religion.